THE NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS
BENGALURU • MONDAY • MAY 24, 2021 • ₹7.00 • PAGES 32 • LATE CITY EDITION

READ SHARE FOLLOW
newindianexpress.com
facebook.com/thenewindianexpress twitter.com/newindianexpress
instagram.com/newindianexpress

B.1.617 VARIANT: EXPERTS URGE GOVT TO RETHINK VAX POLICY

The two major vaccines available in India may have less efficacy against the B.1.617 strain, say experts citing a recent UK study

PFIZER JAB OFFERS BETTER PROTECTION: STUDY

According to a recent study by Public Health England, the two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine offer just 60% efficacy, while the protection after a single dose is much lower. The jab, however, has 66% efficacy after two doses against the B.1.1.7 strain, first detected in the UK. The study showed the Pfizer vaccine was 88% effective against B1617 and 93% against B.1.1.7

'NEED FRESH MODELLING, SEROSURVEYS'

- According to virologist Gagandeep Kang, fresh modelling and serosurveys are urgently needed to optimise strategy for India
- It is better to reduce infection risk in a large number of people by offering one dose, rather than protecting a smaller group with the two-dose regimen, said virologist Sudhanshu Vrati | P7

GOVT

CLAIMS BOTH COVISHIELD AND COVAXIN PROTECT AGAINST MOST COVID STRAINS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

INDIA ON SUNDAY EVENING BECAME THE THIRD NATION AFTER U.S. & BRAZIL TO CROSS 3 LAKH CUMULATIVE FATALITIES

As black fungus cases rise, state sees highest Covid-19 toll at 626

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IN the background of the growing epidemic of mucormycosis (black fungus), Karnataka on Sunday reported its highest Covid fatalities at 626 in a single day.

With an increasing number of mucormycosis cases being reported from across the state, the worrisome scenario could be that of deaths spiking in the days to come, although these will not be labelled as "Covid deaths".

This latest dread is being looked upon as a separate disease, and Health Commissioner Dr Thrilok Chandra too confirmed that mucormycosis cases are being recorded separately and not as part of Covid-19, especially after the State Government recently declared it as an epidemic.

All the patients who are suffering from mucormycosis have developed the condition while being treated for Covid with steroids and administered oxygen without ensuring water hygiene. Over 15 patients have been reported dead by eight hospitals in Bengaluru alone so far, and on Sunday, Hubballi reported its first mucormycosis death, while ten additional such cases and one more death was reported from Udupi. Belagavi too reported two deaths, both septuagenarians.

Dr Pradeep Rangappa, senior consultant, Critical Care, Columbia Asia Referral Hospital, Yeshwanthpur, said, "We are seeing a lot of black fungus cases, but not too many deaths by it, even in other districts. Those who present early are getting treated. Once it spreads to the eyes, it is alarming as it can easily reach the brain, which could be fatal."

Dr Manoj Kumar, Dean-cum-Director, Bowring and Lady Curzon Medical College, which is the nodal centre for treating black fungus, said, "We have 10 dedicated beds to treat mucormycosis patients. However, the number of patients infected has increased and we currently have accommodated 32 of them. We cannot say if mucormycosis is causing many deaths. In the coming days, if cases go up, it will be difficult to handle them all."

Meanwhile, the record number of fatalities on Sunday took the Covid toll past the 25K-mark to 25,282. The mortality rate too increased from 1.02 per cent to 1.04 per cent. Bengaluru alone reported 362 deaths, taking its mortality rate to 1 per cent from Saturday's 0.97 per cent. P4

KARNATAKA	MAY 22	MAY 23
Fresh cases	31,183	25,979
Recoveries	61,766	35,573
Deaths	451	626

A policeman chases away people who were out during the statewide lockdown, put in place to curb the spread of Covid-19, at Chickpet Market in Bengaluru on Sunday | SHRIRAM BN

Vaccine a distant reality in rural India, shows app

Abysmally low rates of vaccination in rural districts across India

PRANAB MONDAL, HARPREET BAJWA, SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI & RAJESH ASNANI @ Kolkata/Chandigarh/Mumbai/Jaipur

"VACCINE *suna hai magar hum logo ko na mila. Kaise milega na jante hain* (I have heard about the vaccine but not got it. I don't know how to get it either)," said Raghunandan Paswan, 50, a daily wage labourer in Vaishali district of Bihar.

Paswan's lament sums up the progress of the vaccination in the rural areas. An analysis of data available on the CoWin app shows that vaccination in the rural belts of most states is lagging behind urban centres.

Given that the Covid-19 pandemic is now raging in the villages, it has set off alarm bells in health circles. It's a major concern, considering that medical facilities and awareness levels are below urban standards.

Take the case of West Bengal, where Covid cases are out of control following the recent elections. Till May 20, 30% of Kolkata and the adjoining urban pockets spread over four districts had been vaccinated. This is in sharp contrast to the 14 rural districts in the state, where seven districts have a vaccination percentage of less than 10.

In north Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, only 5.8% of the population had been vaccinated. This is followed by Birbhum with only 8.74%. Among the better performing rural districts is South Dinajpur, with 15.3%. No other rural district crosses 12%.

Even in these places, the gap is big between municipal centres and gram panchayats. Around 15,488 doses were administered in the Jhargram municipality area. In the rural Gopiballavpur block in the same district, with a population three times that of the pocket in Jhargram, the figure is 8,250 only.

The rural-urban divide is stark in Punjab also. CONTINUED ON: P8

WORRYING TREND

BIHAR
About 60% of urban Bihar vaccinated. Just 5% of rural population has got the shots. 76% of new cases and deaths reported from villages

MADHYA PRADESH
Vax in urban districts like Indore (27%), Bhopal (24%), Gwalior (24%). Rural districts like Agar Malwa (11%), Umaria (10%), Harda (11%), Alirajpur (8%)

MAHARASHTRA
Mumbai (43.11%), Pune (47.31%), Nagpur (48.55%), as against rural districts Gadchiroli (18.65%), Palghar (18.1%), Hingoli (17.17%)

PUNJAB
Bathinda (9.79%), Ferozpur (4.51%), Fatehgarh Sahib (9.63%), Muktsar Sahib (9.62%), Mansa (7.9%), Moga (9.56%), Sangrur (7.9%)

WEST BENGAL
30% of all doses administered in Kolkata and adjoining districts. In 14 rural districts, max vaccination in South Dinajpur (15.35%)

RAJASTHAN
Sawai Madhopur (19.9%), Dausa (16.36%), Pratapgarh (17.21%), Jalore (17.25%), Tonk (17.6%), Dungarpur (18%)

Moderna shoos off Punjab, sets trend for others

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

REFUSAL by Moderna, a US based Covid-19 vaccine maker, on Sunday to directly supply doses to the Punjab government came as a reminder that global bids by individual states to procure vaccines from the international market may not yield favorable results.

Experts said the international tenders floated by several state governments like UP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Kerala, apart from Punjab, pit them against one another, besides sending a wrong message that the Covid response in the country is uncoordinated.

In a country already reeling under an acute shortage of vaccines, this development adds to the worries of the authorities as only around 14.4 crore people have received their first dose, while a meagre 4.14 crore have got the second one. The daily vaccination number, too, has come down to just 1-2 million a day, after peaking to over four million per day in early April.

The Punjab government, which had approached top vaccine makers, including Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, J&J and Sputnik V for direct supply, said Moderna got back claiming it would "only deal with Government of India". CONTINUED ON: P8

Patient's son attacks doc at Ballari hosp

KIRAN BALANNANAVAR @ Ballari

TENSION prevailed at VIMS Hospital in Ballari city on Sunday after a woman duty doctor was assaulted by the relative of a Covid patient. The police arrested the attacker soon after.

The attacker, Thippeswamy M (33), is seen arguing with the doctor, Dr Priyadarshini, inside the Covid ward and then assaulting her. The incident was caught on a CCTV camera inside the ward and the video went viral on social media sites. Netizens demanded strict and immediate action against the attacker and also requested better security for doctors fighting the pandemic. The Cowl Bazar Police, who registered a case, said the attacker's father, who was being treated for Covid-related issues for a week, died on Sunday morning. "His father, who was 65-years-old, was admitted to VIMS last week. On Sunday, his relatives blamed hospital authorities for his death and started arguing with the duty doctor. Though Dr Priyadarshini tried to explain to the relatives how the death occurred, the son attacked her," a police official said.

District Health Officer Dr H L Janardhan said, "People should control their emotions. All the doctors and frontline medical staff are working hard to fight the pandemic and such attacks bring down their morale. A case has been registered with the police. We request relatives to reach higher authorities at hospitals, instead of taking law into their hands." P3

A clip from CCTV footage at the VIMS Hospital shows the assault on the doctor.

LOCKDOWN EXTENDED IN DELHI, HARYANA, RAJASTHAN

Lockdown was extended on Sunday in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Puducherry till May-end or beyond. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the process of 'unlock' will start from May 31. Rajasthan extended the lockdown till June 8, while Haryana's lockdown will stay till May 31

NATIONWIDE	MAY 22	MAY 23
Fresh cases	2,57,299	2,40,842
Recoveries	3,57,630	3,55,102
Deaths	4,194	3,741 (Mon)

No honorarium for 3 months for ASHA workers, says HDK

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE State Government has not paid the honorarium to ASHA workers for the last three months and it should be released immediately, said senior JDS leader and former chief minister **H D Kumaraswamy** on Sunday.

Last year, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa had announced an incentive of ₹3,000 to ASHA workers as part of the Covid financial aid package during the first wave.

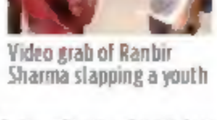
Kumaraswamy's appeal came after an ASHA worker stopped Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilisers D V Sadananda Gowda on Sunday, and pleaded with him to get the pending amount released. The ASHA worker told the minister that without the money, they are finding it tough to run their families. "Hardly 50 per cent of ASHA workers have received the honorarium. So far, 16 workers have lost their lives battling Covid, but the government has paid a compensation of ₹50 lakh to only one, while forgetting others," he said.

Accusing the government of endangering the lives of health workers, he asked, "How can one trust the government on its ₹1,250-crore package when it has failed to pay the pending amounts to ASHA workers?"

ABUSIVE CHHATTISGARH COLLECTOR SHUNTED OUT

EJAZ KAISER @ Raipur

FOLLOWING widespread outrage on social media over Surajpur collector Ranbir Sharma slapping a youth and smashing his mobile phone for allegedly flouting lockdown norms, the Chhattisgarh governemnt on Sunday transferred the IAS officer to the state secretariat. "I am upset with this incident. I apologise to the young man and his family," said Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, who also issued directions to compensate the youth with a new mobile handset. Sharma, too, apologised for slapping the youth, identified as Aman Mittal. "I am satisfied with the government action. Today I received a new mobile phone from the collector," said Mittal.



Video grab of Ranbir Sharma slapping a youth

Most states favour conducting Class 12 board exams, final decision on June 1

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

A high-level meeting on Sunday discussed whether to conduct Class 12 board exams at designated centres for 19 major subjects or hold shorter exams at schools, but no decision was taken due to a lack of consensus. The meeting was chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and attended by Union Ministers Ramesh Pokhriyal, Prakash Javadekar, Smriti Irani and Sanjay Dhotre, besides education ministers and secretaries of several states.

According to sources, the CBSE has proposed that exams be held between July 15 and August 26 and the result declared in September.

Most states left it for the Centre to take the call, but Maharashtra said the examinations should be cancelled altogether, while Delhi and Kerala suggested that all students must be vaccinated before the tests.

"Following a detailed discussion with states, it was decided that more deliberation will be carried out," said an official. The states were asked to send their suggestions by Tuesday.

Meanwhile, sources said neither the CBSE nor the government is in favour of cancelling the examinations.

"The option of holding CBSE board exams in 19 major subjects found support from many states," an official said. A decision is likely by June 1.

2ND PU EXAMS MUST BE HELD: SURESH

Minister for Primary and Secondary Education S Suresh Kumar, during his meeting with Union HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank on Saturday, supported the idea of holding Second PU and CBSE Class 12 examinations |

HEALING HAND

Bureaucrats, police officers who double as doctors

RAJESH ASNANI, RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR & ANURAAG SINGH @ Jaipur/Patna/Bhopal

THEY are qualified doctors by training, but bureaucrats or police officers by profession. They had donned the white coat of medical practitioners before clearing the civil service examinations and becoming IAS or IPS officers.

Now in this hour of crisis caused by the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, besides doing their jobs as a chief executive or a district magistrate, they take out time to visit hospitals and double up as doctors to treat Covid patients.

Meet Manju Sheoran Jakhar, S M Thiyagrajan and Anil Kumar among others, the first two being IAS officers of the Rajasthan and Bihar cadre respectively, and the third an IPS officer in UP. All three had studied MBBS. They are now putting their medical training to good use, playing a double role with ease.

Manju Sheoran Jakhar

S M Thiyagrajan

Jakhar, a 2016 batch IAS officer, is the chief executive officer of the Udaipur District Council and oversees rural development work under the MNREGA. She studied MBBS at the Lady Hardinge Medical College in New Delhi and also completed her MS in gynaecology before cracking the civil services exam.

Given her medical background, she was assigned the work of ensuring oxygen supply to patients and to fill the gap in Covid testing facilities. During her almost daily rounds of hospitals to ensure this, she takes out time to see patients in the wards of the RNT Medical College Hospital in Udaipur, among others.

Jakhar also gives phone consultation to patients. "A lot of treatment is done on the phone itself as every family has someone or other suffering from Covid. I check their reports, symptoms and track their treatment. This will continue as I am doctor," she said. To manage medical oxygen, her team collected data from hospitals requiring oxygen and then rationed it. CONTINUED ON: P7

EXPRESS READ

Olympian Sushil Kumar in 6-day police custody

New Delhi: A Delhi court sent Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar to six days' police custody on Sunday for interrogation in connection with the killing of a fellow wrestler. Kumar and his associates allegedly assaulted wrestler Sagar Dhankar (23), and two of his friends, at the Chhatrasal stadium, on the intervening night of May 4 and 5 | P8

WITH THIS ISSUE THE ESSENTIAL CAMPUS DIGEST edex
28 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF EDEX (TABLOID), 4 OF CITY EXPRESS